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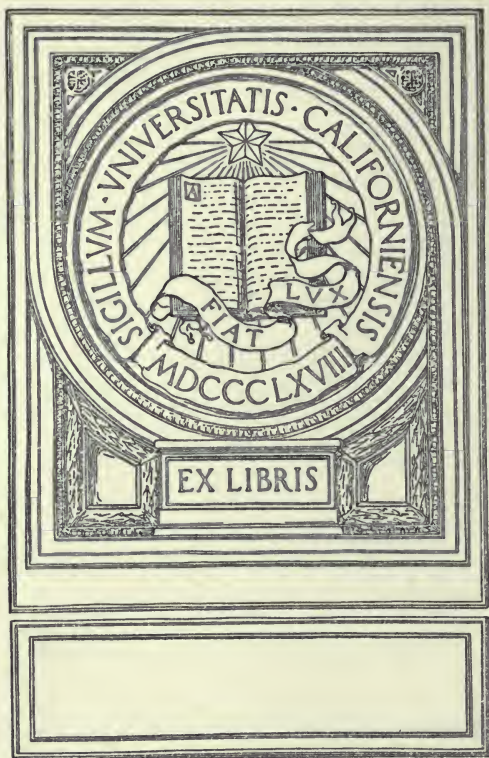
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At The
Squire's
BY

MARY SALTONSTALL PARKER.

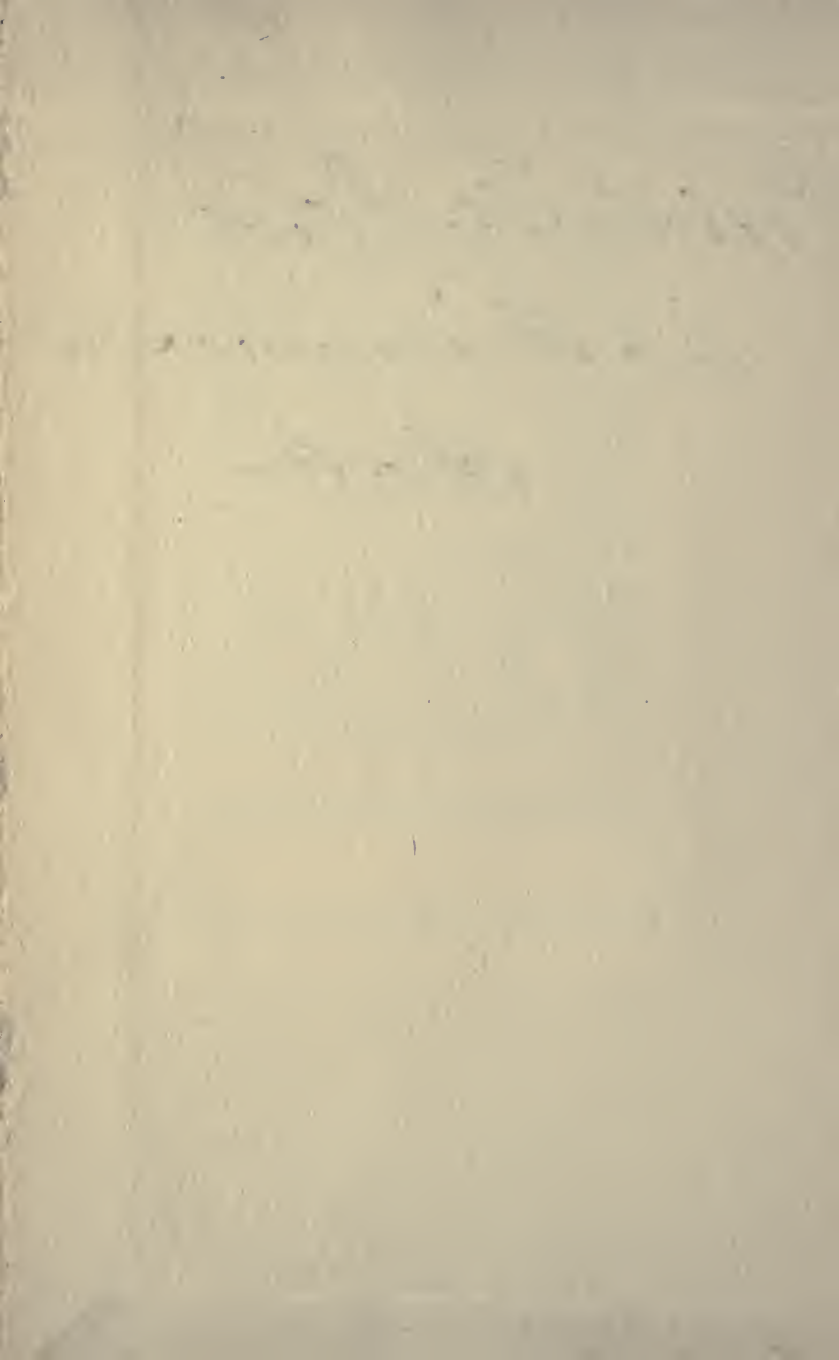
In
Old Salem

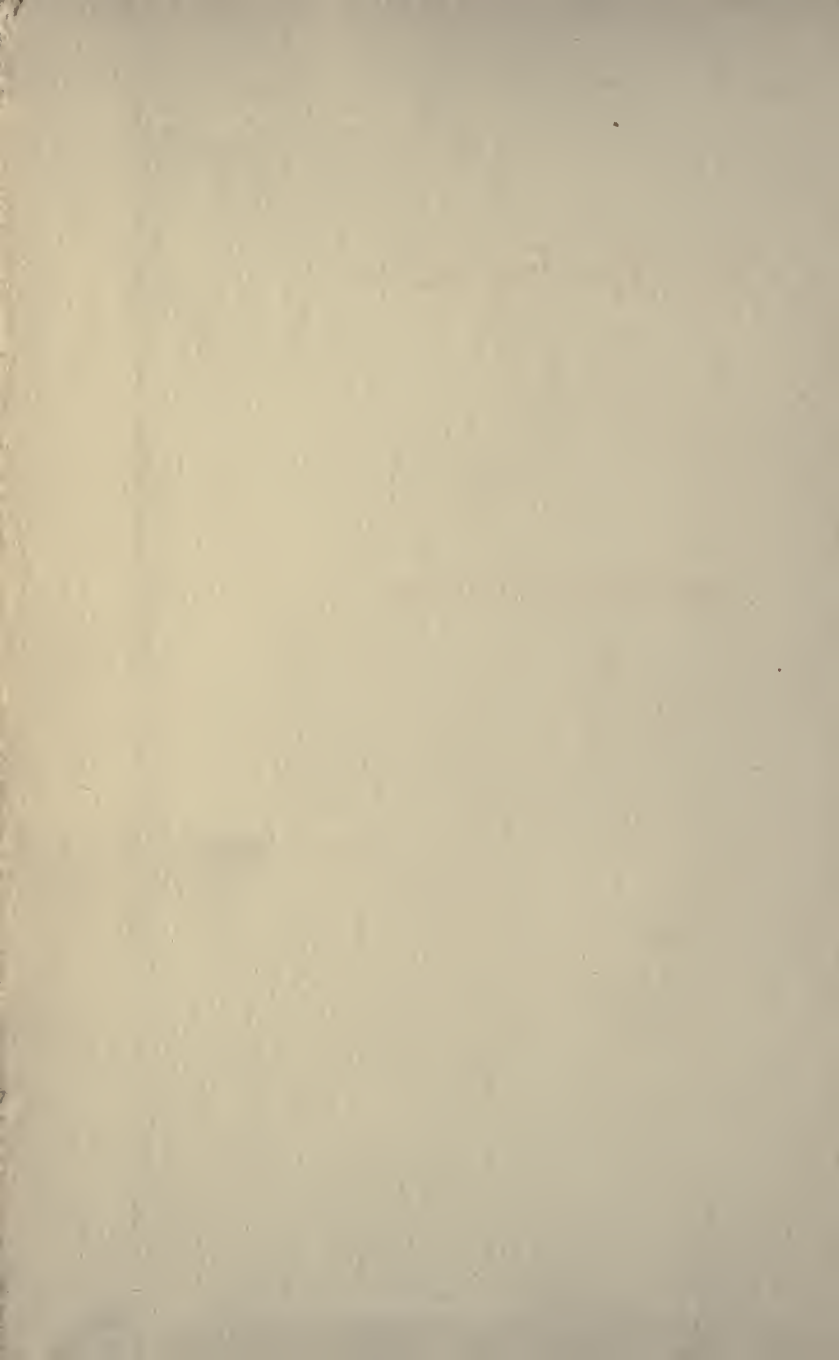


✓
Emily W. Eliot

46 Brimmer Street

Boston





At the Squire's

in Old Salem.

MARY SALTONSTALL PARKER,

AUTHOR OF

Salem Scrap Book.

Rules for Salad, in rhyme.

A Baker's Dozen of Charades.

Salem, Massachusetts,
MDCCCXCVII.

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At the Squire's in Old Salem.

The Squire's house was built of wood ;
Like many in those days, it stood
End on the street. Its front door placed
Inside a yard, to eastward faced.
From street to garden, trimly kept,
The long and narrow mansion crept.
The parlor always in its best
Stood, as if waiting for a guest.
Then hall, and dining room, thence through
The kitchens, (there were several too)

Succeeding pantries lastly led
To storerooms and an ample shed.
Presiding o'er these kitchens' space
Was one of power ; her thrifty race
Is almost in these days extinct :
So faithful, so her care was linked
With what her mistress should betide,
Few interests had she outside.
She her assistant too, could claim,
Phoebe perhaps, or Ruth by name ;
Hair meekly pushed behind her ears,
And boasting, say, a dozen years,
She oft, "The Little Help," was styled.
O, serious faced, unchildlike child,
When, work "done up," they bade you play,
I cannot think you knew the way !
Although 't would seem she might mayhap
But fill the tiniest kind of gap,
In all departments would she reach
And fit in any yawning breach.

Breakfast is over, and the Squire
Sits with his paper by the fire.
He finds it pleasant, conning o'er
Its columns thus, the blaze before.
No bulky page of morning news
Envelops him from eyes to shoes,



Like ours, wherein accounts are stored
Of what transpires each day abroad ;
*"Last night a bridge gave way in Florence,
In Cork today it rains in torrents."*
The hour these things take place, we're able
To know it by Atlantic cable !
No, for such news the Squire must wait
It reached him just a full month late.
His wants in this respect were met
Twice every week by the Gazette.

He and his wife would always greet
With joy that semi-weekly sheet ;
For often items would there be
Of interest to Madam T.
"The Misses Batchelder report
A fresh invoice of goods just bought.
Upon their shelves this week are seen
The choicest grasscloth and nankeen."
Or from the stock of Francis Choate
The Squire would new consignments quote.
"Pink tabby velvet, fine sarsnet
And many shades of bombazet."
Should ladies be in need of shoes,
Here is a chance they must not lose.
"Prunella shoes, just one more case,
Charles Brooks at figures low will place."

As now and then, he reads a bit
Not idle does his good wife sit.
The glass and silver she prefers
No other hand should wash but hers.
So at the breakfast table's end
To this detail would she attend.
To "wipe" the "Little Help" stood by
Who, when each piece was polished dry,
The table 'gainst the wall must wheel
Till wanted for another meal.



When everything was cleared away
Good Madam T. began her day.
Twelve shirts, her skilful fingers sewing
Were fast to their completion growing.
The finest linen 'twas her care,
And nothing less the Squire should wear.
Sure, patience added to her skill
The lady needed for that frill,
Which ruffled down each shirt front flowed,
And scarce the tiny stitches showed.

Its filmy linen cambric made
A snowy rippling cascade.
No modern craft can, I believe,
So exquisite a texture weave
As that, on which the edge to hem,
She picked up threads, and counted them.
Thus as she worked, her ear would catch
Perchance, the lifting of the latch.
(They never thought of locked doors keeping,
Except at night when all were sleeping.)
Some neighbor 't was, who stopped to say,
"Good morning" passing on his way.
Then others came, without a knock
Or ring, and now 't was twelve o'clock.
At noon each day when skies were fair
The Squire's lady took the air.
A sprightly niece, Miss Nancy G.
Was living then, with Madam T.
This maiden's charms of mind and form
Had taken Salem quite by storm.
So donning now, her best pelisse
"Down street" the aunt walked with her niece.
They would examine for themselves
Those latest goods upon the shelves.
Miss Batchelder before their view
Held up in turn, each fabric new,

And all the while remarks would drop,
To her Mamma behind the shop,
Discussing in a sort of whine
The way in which that day they'd dine.



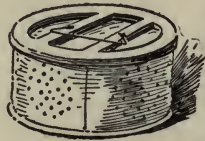
“What ! nimblecake” her voice protests
“And coffee Ma, to give our guests !
Good apple sauce and roast pork Ma,
Nice pretty victuals surely are.”

Our ladies' shopping finished, they
Must hasten home, without delay.
For, time 'twould be for dinner soon.
Now later on that afternoon,
The "Little Help" in cloak and hood,
And more than ever serious mood,
Before her mistress, stood to note
Her words and learn them well by rote.
Those words portentous, to invite
Twelve dames to tea next Thursday night.
"And do you well the message know
To give to Mrs. 'Thus and So'?"
Asked Mrs. T. "Repeat once more
What you must say at every door."
The child her lesson knew by heart,
And gravely thus rehearsed the part.
"My mistress charged me to convey
Her kind respects to you today.
Wishing your presence to bespeak
At tea with us on this day week.
And hoping in the evening she
May also your good husband see."
"That's right" the lady said; "Now go
And hurry back your stent to sew.
And when your spelling has been learned
An hour's play you will have earned.
But dear, about that 'husband' clause

You must discriminate, because
(As in the case of good Miss S.)
Some might not such a thing possess.
And widows, ghastly would it be
To ask *their* husbands after tea !”
So fared it daily much the same
With our good friends, till Sunday came.
Then to the household came a rest.
With care each member early dressed ;
And all together walked, to search
The Scriptures in the Old North Church.



No furnace heated temple that
In winter, where the faithful sat.
Severe and plain the structure, whose
Interior showed square high backed pews.
One fire did what it could to thaw
The atmosphere about the door.
The old and feeble it behove
To choose their seats quite near the stove ;
When very low the mercury fell,
The Squire's party (knowing well
What comfort lay in good warm feet
Well toasted underneath the seat)
Took footstoves with them when they went,
The church's warmth to supplement.
" For " said the Squire " with frozen limbs
No one can properly sing hymns."
(He always standing in his place,
To Duke Street roared a sonorous bass)
Down from the singing seats the choir
Poured melody with zest and fire.





*"This maiden's charms of mind and form
Had taken Salem quite by storm."*

The " Help " on Sunday evenings sped
Their work, and went betimes to bed,
And so stored up their strength to gain
Fresh impulse for next day's campaign.
That day which could not be ignored
Held sacred to the washing board !
The festal Thursday dawned ; this date
Had focussed every thought of late.
The Squire's household, ere the sun
Was up, their breakfast had begun.
The parlor by a vigorous broom
Invaded was ; to warm the room
A pile of giant logs all day
Upon its hearth must blaze away.
Miss Nancy said she'd undertake
To make her specialty, a cake
Whose rich ingredients mixed by pounds
Were moulded into " Hearts and Rounds."
So work went forward till four o'clock,
Then Aunt and Niece in festive frock,
Hands folded, sat them down in state
The first arrival to await.
They had not very long to sit,
Ere swung the portal to admit
Guest number one, who broke the ice,
The others following in a trice ;

By pairs and singly in they trouped
Till all about the fire were grouped.
Their gowns were for the most part made
Of sombre hues and rich brocade,
And each one carried as a rule
Some kind of bag or reticule,
For even when on pleasure bent
They liked their time to be well spent,
And took with industry befitting,
Some dainty needle work or knitting.

For tales the ladies' memories taxed
The conversation merry waxed.
(Among them all Miss Nancy G.
Was held a queen for repartee.)
Jest followed jest, and often it
Was really scintillating wit.
At half past five a gentle knock
Broke in upon the general talk.
Good Madam T. rose to her feet
And every guest too left her seat.
Moving together two and two
They passed in file the entry through.
Anticipation of the spread
Could in each countenance be read.
First, Madam T. must distribute
The revellers her mind to suit,

Who then were bid, themselves to wedge
About the groaning table's edge ;
They seated finally, again
To their suspended tongues gave rein.
The " Little Help " decked in her best,
And all excitement (though suppressed,)
Her long sleeved apron newly starched
With prim step round the table marched.
That table ! pausing I imbibe



Fresh inspiration to describe
Its beauty, and its toothsome freight ;
Mere words seem so inadequate !
Two urns the tea and coffee poured,
The short cake crisp (baked on a board)
Was brought in fresh and passed about
As oft as the supply gave out.
And biscuits here, and flapjacks vied
With waffles on the other side.
O, how the scorched salt fish was relished !
Great bowls of quince the board embellished,
And from their depths with generous dips
The guests were served and smacked their lips.
The dainties thickly clustering drew
Warm praises from the feasting crew,
Who asked the hostess " Pray would she
Bestow on them that recipe ?"

A tray of whips came last ; a dream
Made up of jam and beaten cream
Disposed by layers in glasses high
Well pleasing both to taste and eye.
Now when the feast in its variety
Had been enjoyed to full satiety,
Up rose the ladies to withdraw
And seek the parlor as before.
(The hostess and Miss Nancy counted
Their number to fourteen amounted)
There stood the Squire to extend
A cordial hand to every friend ;
One single man ! He needs must brace
Himself a like ordeal to face !
His courage had not equal been
To taking tea with all fourteen !
For him upon the pantry slide
An early bite had been supplied.

The door to swing again began
And husbands turned up to a man.
They now for whist made up their sets.
(I think those cheerful faced quartettes
Were just as happy on the whole
Not knowing Cavendish or Pole !)

Then for the " Little Help " that night,
There still was one remaining rite.

At curfew, she a tray brought in,
Its burden reaching to her chin.
With cheeks like theirs, the anxious child
Bore pyramids of apples piled.
Raisins there were, and walnuts cracked,
Close ranks of glasses stood compact,
While two decanters held some sort
Of sherry, and a priceless port.

And last, the playful Squire commanded
A plate of cockles to be handed ;
Those sugar cockles tightly rolled
Did each a sentiment enfold.
“ It mattered not ” the Squire said
“ That he was elderly and wed.
He liked the mottoes to unwind
Some bit of sentiment to find !”



*These tiny cornucopias of sugar, white and colored, each containing a couplet, expressive of a tender sentiment, printed on a slip of paper, were often seen on the table at parties twenty-five years ago. They were made by a French confectioner, and not found, I think, out of Salem.



The final parting guest was sped ;
The entertainers moved to bed.
Only the master stayed below
The bolts to slide and lights to blow.
Farewells yet lingering on the air,
He mounted then the twisting stair ;
His big repeater having wound.
And ere its hands had travelled round
Another fleeting hour to mark,
The Squire's house was still and dark.





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